

I am writing in support of delaying the implementation of the requirements regarding reading models or programs.

No matter what they look like or where they come from, each and every child deserves a quality education with well-prepared teachers and the resources to help meet the needs of all our students. Reading achievement has historically been a concern at all levels of our society. As a reading interventionist, there is not “one” program that will support every child’s reading development. It is time, teacher professional development, high expectations, and access to a variety of resources that will continue to support the growth of all students in the area of reading. To mandate school districts choose one of the five “approved” reading programs is creating a larger disparity, unrealistic expectations, and a recipe for continued Failure.

This state mandate is unfunded, expecting local districts to bear the burden of purchasing costly programs. In small districts, it would take close to \$1 million to implement. School districts throughout Connecticut are not equitably or equally funded, and this mandate requires districts with limited funding and resources to purchase an “approved” program. This state mandate is unrealistic because there is not one program that meets the needs of all students. As a reading interventionist, I understand what it takes to help students grow in their reading skills, interest, and achievement. It requires the flexibility of multiple resources, training, literacy coaching, literacy interventionist, and monitoring to help each and every student grow as a reader. It is not a single strategy or program. Furthermore, the mandate is undoing the work that many districts have dedicated to finding the right balance that is in a continuous mode of reflection, research and refinement.

The state mandate is a recipe for continued failure. This mandate and the approved reading programs are limited. Some do not even have the phonics component that is required for approval. There is a lack of culturally responsive representation because most of the characters are animals. It is not comprehensive because reading is more than just phonics. Reading includes joy, engagement, and experiences that our students can connect to. These programs are also telling students what to think and not how to think critically. If we do not teach students how to think critically, we are not preparing our students for an ever-changing global world where they can be socially responsible citizens.

I would like to propose a suspension of this mandate. During this suspension, there should be a collaborative opportunity for Literacy Coaches, Literacy Interventionists and Special Education teachers from every district to work directly with the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success and the Reading Leadership Implementation Council in order to provide accurate accounts, information, and lived experiences of the children they work closely with every day. If not every district, then a wide selection of districts that represent all demographics from Suburban communities, Urban communities and Rural communities. The current members of the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success and the Reading Leadership Implementation Council members do not represent a diverse perspective or experience of educators, literacy coaches, interventionist or special education teachers. Nor do they represent the students they claim to support.

